

Hinsdale considers how big a parking garage is needed downtown



A rendering of the new Hinsdale Middle School. (Cordogan Clark & Associates / Handout)

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Hinsdale officials don't want to blow "a once in a lifetime opportunity" to improve parking in their downtown.

That's how they view the plan to partner with Hinsdale-Clarendon Hills Elementary District 181 and build a parking garage next to the new Hinsdale Middle School, at 100 S. Garfield St.

So the Village Board is inviting public input on the choice of two sizes for the village portion of the garage.

The board committed Tuesday to paying for the second level of a parking deck. The top level will have 124 spaces for the middle school staff.

The lower level would be available to customers of Hinsdale's downtown businesses, who often complain about the lack of parking spaces close to the stores, salons and restaurants they want to patronize.

The village is considering two designs for the lower level. One would have 189 parking spaces and cost an estimated \$4.5 million; the other would have 118 spaces and cost an estimated \$2.8 million.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning did a parking study of Hinsdale's central business district in 2014 and reported all of the spaces with parking meters were full between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. The agency reported that 85 percent occupancy would be ideal, so that drivers do not have to circle through the downtown repeatedly looking for an open space.

To reach that goal, and allow spaces for businesses that may move into vacant buildings, the village staff calculated the smaller deck should be sufficient.

But Village President Thomas Cauley, Jr. acknowledged determining the best number of parking spaces is more art than science. He wants to hear what residents and business owners think.

"This is a big enough issue we want to have it fully vetted," Cauley said.

The school district was planning to issue the first set of bid documents for the project in mid-February.

Village Trustee Laura LaPlaca urged the village administration to have bid documents prepared for both size decks, which would cost the village an additional \$8,500.

She and Trustee Jerry Hughes said officials do not know how much business is lost due to people who give up trying to find a parking space and how many business owners choose not to locate in Hinsdale because of its limited parking spaces.

The village has posted information about the parking garage options and a link for residents to comment on the issue on its website, www.villageofhinsdale.org.

"We are going to have residents who never go to the downtown between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., who will automatically say 'go for the smaller garage,'" predicted Trustee Luke Stifflear. "On the flip side, business owners will want the larger parking garage because they would not have to pay for it."

Brian Kronewitter, the school district's architect, said he needs the village's decision by April 1.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity," Cauley said. "We don't want to make a bad decision here."

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